



GRAIN TRANSPORTATION REPORT

Shipper and Exporter Assistance Program
Transportation and Marketing
Agricultural Marketing Service
United States Department of Agriculture

January 5, 1998

Barge Pilots Seek To Organize. In an attempt to negotiate increased wages, pilots of inland river towboats throughout the United States are seeking to recruit members into what may be the first union for wheelhouse captains across all major barge lines. According to leaders of the group, Pilots Agree, there are enough pilots joining the group to feasibly threaten a strike if a deal cannot be negotiated by September 1, 1998. This would coincide with the beginning of fall harvest, a time during which grain transport down the Mississippi River becomes vital. Fred Hunter, a river pilot in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and a Pilots Agree organizer, has stated that "we don't want to cripple the industry; we just want a wage we can live under." Hunter would like to see the current average annual pilot salary of \$50,000 doubled. Hunter said that tonnage per tow for which a pilot is responsible, is growing and argues that benefits are being eroded, while the base salary has not increased relative to minimum wage increases. A rate increase of 10-cents-per-ton on all commodities would pay for the wage increase, according to Hunter. Although Pilots Agree organizers claim that membership is increasing, barge industry analysts feel their efforts will face long odds. If, for instance, a strike is not broadly supported, barge companies could order their remaining pilots to work longer than the normal 30 consecutive days on each boat, as well as have certain qualified office personnel fill in. Also, analysts believe that a successful strike would be hindered by the political influence of powerful manufacturing and transportation companies, which may own or, at least, be involved in customer contracts with the barge lines. (*Bridge News*)

Railcar Deliveries To Port. Railcar deliveries of grain unloaded at port elevators for the week ended December 24, 1997, totaled 5,638 cars, 629 fewer cars than were unloaded for the similar week in 1996. In comparison, port unloads have reached levels of 12,000 cars or more during peak export periods. The largest increase in railcar deliveries for the week ended December 24, was at South Atlantic and Gulf ports, where an increase of 222 cars occurred when compared to the corresponding period in 1996. During the past 4 weeks, rail deliveries have averaged 4,177 cars to Pacific Coast ports, while deliveries to South Atlantic and Gulf ports, have averaged 2,140 cars, compared to 4,610 cars and 2,477 cars, respectively, for the corresponding period in 1996.

River Situation. At the Melvin Price Locks and Dam during the previous 24 hours ending midnight Sunday (Jan. 4), 5 tows with 58 barges passed upbound, and 10 tows with 120 barges passed in the downbound direction. On Monday (Jan. 5), at 6:00 a.m., there were no tows waiting to go in either the upbound or downbound direction. In the Columbia River Basin on Friday (Jan. 2), 6 vessels were at berth loading, while 7 waited.

NOTE: The *Grain Transportation Report* will not be issued on Jan. 19 in observance of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Pages 3 and 4 will be available on the fax back system and also on the Internet.

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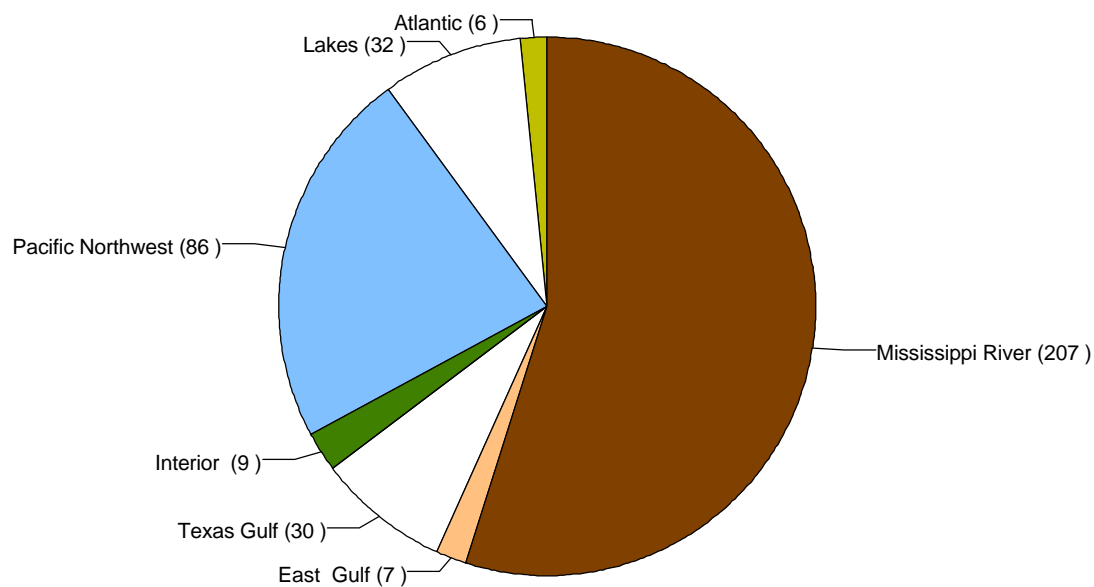
SOUTHBOUND BARGE FREIGHT RATES*

Week Ended December 26

River/Region	Contract Period	Rate**
Mid Mississippi	30 Day Open	137.5

* Based on Actual Trades from the Merchants Exchange of St. Louis Barge Call Session

** Rates are Quoted as a Percentage of the 1976 Tariff Benchmark

**U.S. GRAIN EXPORTS, BY REGION
NOVEMBER 1997***million bushels*

**WEEK
ENDED****1997****COMPARABLE WEEK
1996****INSPECTIONS FOR EXPORT***1,000 Bushels*

Nov 27	83,598 *	116,973
Dec 4	88,979 *	92,479
Dec 11	92,256 *	109,281
Dec 18	95,620 *	85,742
Dec 25	60,187	73,728
Calendar Year to Date	3,747,743 *	4,296,664

* Revised

RAIL CARLOADINGS*Carloads*

Nov 29	19,571 *	21,802 *
Dec 6	26,165 *	26,821 *
Dec 13	25,491 *	27,337 *
Dec 20	24,523 *	25,366 *
Dec 27	15,622 *	17,575 *
Calendar Year to Date	1,207,439 *	1,243,621 *

* Revised - Soo Line Not Included

RAIL DELIVERIES TO PORT*Carloads*

	North Atlantic	So. Atlantic & Gulf	Pacific Coast		North Atlantic	So. Atlantic & Gulf	Pacific Coast
Nov 26	75	2,830	4,934	54	3,371	4,596	
Dec 3	73	1,755	4,263	44	2,545	3,950	
Dec 10	12	1,946	5,093 *	28	2,866	4,855	
Dec 17	84	2,432	4,226 *	8	2,293	5,620	
Dec 24	88	2,425	3,126	49	2,203	4,015	
CY to Date	2,613	119,354	194,640 *	2,936	148,629	202,302	

* Revised

BARGE GRAIN MOVEMENTS*1,000 Tons*

River / Lock Number	Week ending 12/27/97					Week ending 12/28/96				
	CORN	WHT.	SOY	OTHER	TOTAL	CORN	WHT.	SOY	OTHER	TOTAL
Miss./15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miss./25	0	0	0	0	0	57	0	0	0	57
Miss./26	402	2	124	2	530	500	3	103	0	614
Miss./27	404	2	121	2	528	261	9	81	0	357
Ill. /8	295	0	142	2	439	352	3	90	0	445
Ohio /52	24	2	9	72	108	54	1	37	59	152
Ark./1	0	13	25	0	38	0	6	35	0	41

Calendar year totals for Miss./27, Ohio/52 and Ark./1:

Year	Corn	Wheat	Soybeans	Other Grains	Total
1997	29,685	2,689	9,584	3,358	45,315
1996	34,210	2,348	8,297	4,107	48,963

Other grains include barley, sorghum and oats. Totals may not add due to rounding. Data source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

MAJOR EXPORT SALES **1,000 Metric Tons*

WEEK ENDED				COMPARABLE WEEK		
	WHEAT	1997 CORN	SOYBEANS	WHEAT	1996 CORN	SOYBEANS
Nov 27	4,299	7,565	6,307	2,666	12,272	6,708
Dec 4	4,136	7,459	6,009	2,653	11,497	6,745
Dec 11	4,003	6,921	5,938	2,528	10,623	6,408
Dec 18	4,004	6,713	5,449	2,587	10,758	6,292
Dec 25	4,281	6,647	5,162	2,760	10,225	5,867

*Unshipped Balances-Current & Next Marketing Year

GULF COAST OCEAN GRAIN VESSELS

		IN PORT	LOADED 7 DAYS	DUE NEXT 10 DAYS			IN PORT	LOADED 7 DAYS	DUE NEXT 10 DAYS
Dec	4	44	59	75			50	52	76
Dec	11	37	54	67			46	54	73
Dec	18	31	58	67			61	50	54
Dec	25	n/a	n/a	n/a			45	49	68
Jan	1	n/a	n/a	n/a			45	42	77

AVERAGE GRAIN PRICES*Dollars Per Bushel*

		WHEAT	CORN ¹	SOYBEANS ²			WHEAT	CORN ¹	SOYBEANS ²
Nov	28	3.83	2.74	7.14			4.89	2.78	7.14
Dec	5	3.85	2.72	7.02			4.74	2.71	7.01
Dec	12	3.83	2.71	7.04			4.77	2.70	6.95
Dec	19	3.68	2.65	6.86			4.78	2.70	7.05
Dec	26	3.61	2.64	6.84			4.59	2.70	7.04

(Wheat-#1 HRW-ORD., Kansas City; Corn-#2 Yellow, Chicago; Soybeans-#1 Yellow, Chicago)

¹ Bought to arrive 15 days; ² Bought to arrive 30 days.**OCEAN FREIGHT RATES****Dollars/Tons - Basis Vessel Size/Ton*

U.S. Loading Port	Destination	Estimated Freight Rates	Dates of Movement
Gulf	Japan	\$21.00 - (54M)	January
Gulf	Rotterdam	\$10.50 - (60M)	January
Gulf	Ecuador	\$18.50 - (20M)	January
Gulf	Egypt	\$13.00 - (55M)	January

*These ocean fixtures are based on full ship charters.